IS CALIFORNIA READY FOR SCHOOL READINESS?

A FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY REPORT

PREPARED FOR THE

CALIFORNIA CHILDREN & FAMILIES COMMISSION

By
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SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The twenty focus group sessions Hart Research conducted throughout California have proved useful in identifying some important opportunities for garnering public support in undertaking a public engagement effort about school readiness. The public is clearly open to a more expansive view of the connection between early childhood learning and overall school performance. They are especially receptive to the value and benefits of universally available pre-school. However, it is important to recognize from the outset that the California Children and Families Commission would face a number of difficult and complex challenges in this effort. Most notably, there are four primary obstacles that must be reckoned with if California is going to assume the task of a school readiness public engagement:

- School readiness is not an issue that is top-of-mind for the vast majority of state residents. For most, it is not a topic that they have spent much, if any, time thinking about.

- When forced to consider the issue, many Californians believe school readiness falls under the purview of parental responsibility. Given the historical borders of the current public education system, they are not instinctively inclined to view this as a natural role for state government.

- The main priority for residents when it comes to the education of children is fixing the current K-to-12 system. Indeed, their fixation on K-to-12 borders on obsession, and this fact results in an important manifestation: Focus group participants believe that the K-to-12 system should lay the first claim to any increased funding for public education.

- State residents hold divergent perspectives and expectations about the interplay between a school readiness initiative and socio-economic status. There is no clear consensus about the universality of these needs, and which particular types of families, if any, should be the focus of a school readiness initiative.

This report is designed to explicate these challenges and describe what we have learned about the potential opportunities among residents for beginning a statewide discussion about school readiness. These findings should provide an important foundation for conducting the next two phases of the communications research, ultimately developing the message strategies, and deploying the most effective messengers for an effective statewide campaign. They also highlight one key area for further research that may help solidify the need for a school readiness initiative in the hearts and minds of the public.

METHODOLOGY

In May and June 2002, Peter D. Hart Research Associates conducted 20 focus groups for the California Children and Families Commission (CCFC). This qualitative study was the first of three phases of formative research designed to explore Californians' attitudes toward and perceptions of school readiness, as well as their responses to information and education about this critical issue. The forthcoming phases will comprise a quantitative survey and ad testing.

These focus groups were conducted to understand the challenges and opportunities that CCFC will face in undertaking a public-engagement campaign to stimulate awareness of the importance of greater school readiness among children under age five.

As indicated in the following table, we drew participants from California's diverse population, including the general market, Hispanics who speak Spanish at home, and African Americans. We also held groups among general-market and Hispanic opinion leaders in Northern and Southern California. Groups among Spanish-speaking Hispanics were conducted in Spanish.

Conducting sessions among small groups of participants for rather long periods of time (approximately two hours each) yields rich, detailed insight into their attitudes toward early childhood development and school readiness. Furthermore, these relatively private and intimate settings capture more than just a snapshot of panelists' current opinions and beliefs; they allow us to gather experiential information, conduct role-playing exercises, and test new ideas and messages. At the same time, it must be remembered that these small groups of Californians do not represent their entire subgroup. Participants' responses cannot be projected to larger populations, but they do give us more general insight into the particular needs and challenges faced by particular populations and the context in which they perceive the need for heightened school readiness.

FOCUS GROUPS CONDUCTED FOR CCFC	
GROUP COMPOSITION	**DATE AND TIME**
LOS ANGELES	
African Americans; mixed gender; college grads; age 25 to 40	5/28/02, 6:00
African Americans; mixed gender; non-college grads; age 25 to 40	5/28/02, 8:00
Hispanic women age 40 to 65 (in Spanish)	6/5/02, 6:00
Hispanic women age 25 to 40 (in Spanish)	6/5/02, 8:00
Hispanic community/opinion leaders (in Spanish)	6/6/02, 6:00
Men; mixed race; college grads; age 25 to 40	6/6/02, 8:00
Community/opinion leaders; mixed race	6/12/02, 12:00
Men; mixed race; college grads; age 40 to 65	6/12/02, 6:00
BERKELEY	
African Americans; mixed gender; college grads; age 40 to 65	5/29/02, 6:00
African Americans; mixed gender; non-college grads; age 40 to 65	5/29/02, 8:00
FRESNO	
Women; mixed race; non-college grads; age 40 to 65	6/1/02, 11:00
Women; mixed race; non-college grads; age 25 to 40	6/1/02, 1:00
SAN DIEGO	
Hispanic men age 40 to 65 (in Spanish)	6/3/02, 6:00
Hispanic men age 25 to 40 (in Spanish)	6/3/02, 8:00
PASADENA	
Women; mixed race; college grads; age 40 to 65	6/4/02, 6:00
Women; mixed race; college grads; age 25 to 40	6/4/02, 8:00
SAN FRANCISCO	
Community/opinion leaders; mixed race	6/10/02, 6:00
Men; mixed race, non-college grads; age 25 to 40	6/10/02, 8:00
SACRAMENTO	
Community/opinion leaders; mixed race	6/11/02, 6:00
Men; mixed race; non-college grads; age 40 to 65	6/11/02, 8:00

GETTING FOCUSED

Participants' goals for California over the next 10 years include reducing crime, violence, and traffic and creating more jobs and affordable housing. Inevitably, someone in nearly every group calls for an improvement in the state's public education system. Californians of all stripes are troubled deeply by the quality and condition of public schools, especially those in poor and minority communities. **When**

people begin to think about the issues surrounding school improvement, however, they focus primarily on elementary and secondary school-age children, not on pre-school-age children.

In discussing the failures of K-to-12 education in California, participants most frequently blame overcrowded classrooms, teachers who have stopped caring, dilapidated facilities, a lack of parental discipline, and the influence of popular culture.

Although participants recognize the role of a loving and nurturing environment, self-confidence, sustained social interaction, and positive pre-school experiences to prepare infants and toddlers for successful academic careers, they do not easily link the problems they witness in schools with the notion that kids entering the classroom are often not in a position to succeed. **Indeed, one key task of a public-engagement campaign might be to draw a clearer and closer connection between the problems of the K-to-12 system and the disadvantages that students have if they do not begin kindergarten ready to learn and achieve their potential. Put in more positive terms, a school readiness campaign might make the case to Californians that improving school readiness is an essential prerequisite to improving K-to-12 education.**

WHAT DOES SCHOOL READINESS MEAN?

Participants do not universally recognize the term "school readiness," and their guesses of its meaning are usually off the mark. They are as likely to assume that school readiness is about ensuring that schools are ready for kids (often in the literal sense of the physical plant/school building/classrooms being ready) as to believe that it is about ensuring that kids are ready for school. In our subsequent research and in any public-engagement effort, it will be important to recognize that the term "school readiness" is not common parlance and to not presume that the phrase itself conveys a widely understood public good. Other phrases such as "learning readiness" may do a better job of conveying the ideas and goals that the Commission might promote under the heading of school readiness.

Whatever difficulties they may have with the terminology, participants are able to express clear perceptions of the content of school readiness and what it means to make sure that children start kindergarten ready to learn and achieve their potential.

When considering the things that are important for preparing young children to enter school at age five, panelists immediately begin talking about parents, believing that most pre-school preparation is the responsibility of mothers and fathers. They talk about moral training and discipline, instilling a sense of self-confidence, and assuring that children feel loved and completely cared for by their parents. In fact, many say that parents are not doing all they can for their children in this area, and that some type of formal parental education is needed, such as classes in which adults can learn how to be good parents. As one college-educated African-American man from Los Angeles recommends, "I want to reiterate parent education, and if there's an organization out there, they should advocate a tax credit where parents can take an education course that if you go get parent education, you get a break from the state. Because that's going to help improve families."

"I think that, actually, we, the parents, are responsible to have children get a better education . . . we are the ones responsible, we parents."

–Hispanic opinion leader
Los Angeles

"I'm actually thinking about the parents, because when a child starts school, if the parents aren't in to what the child is doing and stuff, and their homework, and finding out what assignments are going on . . . I mean, the child's school year could be totally [wasted]."

–Female college graduate
Age 25 to 40
Pasadena

Occasionally, participants discuss the importance of good health and nutrition in preparing young children to learn in school, an issue they consider more a problem for poor and single-parent families. Keeping children's vaccinations up to date and having regular medical checkups are regarded as the primary problems; however, the growing prevalence of employers' eliminating or cutting back on health insurance coverage for entire families is also a contributor.

Pre-school as an essential element of school readiness is raised sometimes, albeit inconsistently, throughout the 20 focus group sessions, although at least a few panelists in each group mention how important it is for children to have positive pre-school experiences. Most believe that the greatest benefit of attending pre-school is developing social skills that are vital to success in school later on, particularly the ability to follow a teacher's direction and interact well with other children. Participants are less likely to stress the importance of academic or cognitive skills such as color recognition, letter recognition, and counting, but they certainly recognize the advantages enjoyed by children who develop these skills early in life, and the inequality of opportunity that currently exists among children.

Panelists can clearly distinguish between pre-school and child care in terms of their respective value for school readiness. When they hear the phrase "child care," most say that it denotes a custodial, rather than an educational circumstance. Thus, they are much less likely to discuss child care under the heading of school readiness.

> **"Pre-natal care and targeting those young people in particular. And what I was saying is, you know, that their parenting skills are going to be lacking . . . focus on providing whatever resources they're going to need to help raise their children as well as uplift themselves to be able to continue to provide resources to their own kids. So, parenting classes should be offered."**
>
> *–African-American woman*
> *Non-college grad, age 40 to 65*
> *Berkeley*

A More Relevant Model of Education

Given participants' focus on K-to-12, not pre-school, education, we asked them to start from scratch and recreate the structure of the public school system. This approach created perhaps our most encouraging opportunity for engaging Californians in a new way of thinking about pre-school education. Once this discussion started, it took on a life of its own, with all panelists agreeing that the confines of the current system are incongruous with the typical lifestyles and demands of American parenting in the 21st century.

> **"What I find here, especially in the Hispanic-American community, is that, usually, the mother is working two or three jobs, the father is working two or three jobs, so there's just no time for the kids."**
>
> *–Hispanic opinion leader*
> *Los Angeles*

> **"I mean, even people that don't have kids, these kids are going to grow up to be members of society. If you teach them right now, you're not gonna have crime later."**
>
> *–Female college graduate*
> *Age 25 to 40*
> *Pasadena*

With the growing number of households with single parents or two working parents, Californians recognize that the current K-to-12 format is not working as well as it could for most parents, and kids are suffering the effects. In addition, participants display an evolved appreciation and understanding of when young children are ready to learn. "The education process begins long before the child reaches the age of five . . . we all know about it, but we're not really focusing on that area. Because we expect and hope that kindergarten and on is going to take care of them," comments one panelist in Pasadena. A woman in Fresno observes that children's brains "just absorb so much more than we thought before five years old. It's like *Sesame Street*, when that came on TV, kids were going around at two years old singing all those songs—they were sucking it all up."

As such, many participants insist on their own that public school education should start at age three; they understand its benefits for both children and parents, but are also able to articulate the residual impacts for non-parents and entire communities. If young people get off to a better start academically,

participants say, they are more likely to maintain and further cultivate the self-esteem that initially blossoms in the home, be better students over the long-term, and be more gainful contributors to society. Thus, in 10 to 20 years, the high school dropout rate will plummet, the college graduation rate will increase, and the crime rate will diminish.

> **"I think that this is a huge priority. Because if you fail at this level, society will pay—pay in welfare, in crime, at every level, society will pay a huge cost. And it's so inexpensive to funnel the money into addressing it at this level and having it be productive."**
>
> *–Female college graduate*
> *Age 25 to 40*
> *Pasadena*

And as the public looks into the future, they see a more competitive globalized economy—an economy in which our children are going to be competing not only against each other, but against their peers around the world. "I've noticed with different countries, they actually start their children off at three and four with education, but we're the only ones who wait until our children are five and six and then decide we want to start educating them," notes a college-educated African-American woman in Los Angeles.

> **"Unlike when I was growing up . . . it's just so competitive. I mean, people getting kids on day-care lists when the baby is in the stomach, uterus, whatever. And the better schools are looking for certain types of kids to come in. Everybody wants their kid to go to a top school. . . . You know, they won't have a chance to get to those better schools and all that. The competition is fierce. I feel it as a parent, my kids feel it.**
>
> *–African-American woman*
> *College graduate*
> *Berkeley*

Closer to home, participants notice growing numbers of upper-middle-class and affluent families giving their children a head start by enrolling them in nursery and pre-schools for a fee. Fearing that less privileged children will be left behind, panelists say that California should make early childhood education available to all residents so that every child in the state will start at the same point. "It's the state's responsibility, because you have to create equality. If you have parents who are rich, sending their children to preschool, they're ready for kindergarten. If you have parents who are poor, who can't afford preschool, they're not ready for kindergarten. So then you have an inequality. I think the state should step in to create that equality," suggests a college-educated African-American man from Los Angeles. Overall, residents believe that a quality public education system in the 21st century requires a pre-school experience that is universally available to children.

GREAT IDEA—BUT BIG ISN'T ALWAYS BETTER

The programmatic possibilities of a school readiness program for California's youngest children can be quite wide-ranging. One could certainly argue that pre-natal care, pediatric health care, information on nutrition and child brain development, working to ensure appropriate parental-leave policies, as well as access to quality child care, nursery schools, pre-schools, and pre-K classes should all be components of a

school readiness program. As such, in each focus group we tested a broad vision statement including each of these components in order to assess which facets Californians find most important and appealing.

We asked panelists to rate the statement on a scale from zero to 10, on which "10" meant that they totally agreed with the statement and "0" meant they totally disagreed. Among a total of 183 participants, 166 gave it a rating of "7" or higher, for an average of 8.83 across all groups. The statement received especially high marks from the following groups of Hispanics in Los Angeles: 40- to 65-year-old women (9.90), 25- to 40-year-old women (9.70), and opinion leaders (9.63). It fared least well among Sacramento's 40- to 65-year-old men who had not graduated from college (6.92), Sacramento's opinion leaders (7.57), and Pasadena's female college graduates age 40 to 65 (7.80).

RATINGS OF SCHOOL READINESS PROGRAM
(0 = DO NOT AGREE AT ALL; 10 = TOTALLY AGREE)

	Rating of 0 to 3	Rating of 4 to 6	Rating of 7 to 10	Average
	#	#	#	#
Los Angeles African-American college grads, 25-40	-	-	10	8.75
Los Angeles African-American non-college grads, 25-40	-	-	9	9.11
Berkeley African-American college grads, 40-65	-	-	10	9.15
Berkeley African American non-college grads, 40-65	-	2	8	9.00
Fresno female non-college grads, 40-65	-	-	11	9.64
Fresno female non-college grads, 25-40	1	1	9	8.45
San Diego Hispanic men, 40-65	-	1	6	9.14
San Diego Hispanic men, 25-40	-	1	6	8.43
Pasadena female college grads, 40-65	1	1	8	7.80
Pasadena female college grads, 25-40	-	1	6	8.86
Los Angeles Hispanic women, 40-65[1]	-	-	10	9.90
Los Angeles Hispanic women, 25-40	-	-	10	9.70
Los Angeles Hispanic community leaders	-	-	8	9.63
Los Angeles male college grads, 25-40	-	-	10	9.20
South San Francisco community leaders	-	2	9	8.36
South San Francisco male non-college grads, 25-40	-	-	7	9.00
Sacramento community leaders	-	2	5	7.57
Sacramento male non-college grads, 40-65	-	2	4	6.92
Los Angeles community leaders	-	-	11	9.09
Los Angeles male college grads, 40-65	-	2	9	8.09
All participants	***2***	***15***	***166***	***8.83***

[1] Hispanic women's groups in Los Angeles read a slightly modified version of the school readiness initiative in Spanish.

"I know there's lots and lots of programs out there, but . . . you just don't know where to look for them. There has to be, whether it's on the Internet or something, some central system where you can find things, and if you think your child's got a problem, you can go check it out and then try and get some help."

–Non-college woman
Age 40 to 65
Fresno

Although most panelists strongly agree with the goals of a school readiness program as stated in the tested vision statement, many believe that it sounds too good to be true. With so many pieces incorporated into the program, the public responds to the statement with such terms as "utopia," "too broad," and "unbelievable." "All these things couldn't occur and happen," says an African-American woman in Berkeley.

The ambitious scope of the program seems too good to be true to some Californians. Most agree that all the individual parts of the statement are important to a child's development, but they do not all believe that each one must be a part of the program. Participants think that many programs included in the statement already exist in some form for residents; instead of duplicating those efforts, they say, parents should receive help navigating the system to tap into programs that already exist, but are perhaps underutilized. It is clear that any school readiness program should not attempt to be too all encompassing for fear that residents will perceive it incredulously.

This finding notwithstanding, focus group participants struggled when asked to select the most valuable parts of the program. When forced to choose panelists agree that nursery and pre-school programs, pediatric health care, pre-natal care, and quality child care would be the most important facets of a school readiness program. Somewhat less important, but nevertheless meaningful, are receiving information and advice about brain development, meeting basic nutritional needs, and having parental-leave policies.

IMPORTANCE OF SCHOOL READINESS PROGRAM ELEMENTS

	Most important #	Least important #
Make sure that all children have access to quality nursery school, pre-school, or pre-k programs that help children develop the skills they need to learn to their potential when they get to kindergarten.	70	12
Make sure that all children in California have access to good pediatric health care, so that the health needs essential to learning are being met	55	8
Make sure that all pregnant women have access to quality pre-natal care and good information about how to care for themselves while they are expecting	44	16
Make sure that all children, including the children of single parents and		

IMPORTANCE OF SCHOOL READINESS PROGRAM ELEMENTS

	Most important #	Least important #
children in households where both parents work, have access to good quality child-care programs	40	20
Make sure parents have access to information and advice about their children's brain development and what they can do as parents to help their children learn and grow to their full potential	38	39
Make sure that the basic nutritional needs of young children are being met, and parents have access to advice and information about nutrition	34	18
Make sure that there are appropriate parental-leave policies in place that give working parents a greater opportunity to be involved in their children's development	32	60

One African-American woman's comments about early education programs succinctly expresses the general sentiment among all the groups: "We definitely need to have the pre-school program. If we're going to do elementary, junior high, and high school, I mean, let's do pre-school so we can get them ready," asserts this Angelino.

The description of a program that would aid parents in meeting the nutritional needs of their children sounded like a welfare program to some. "I kind of had a problem with 'meeting the nutritional needs of young children.' You know, because that's what, that's more on the welfare handout side of food. I don't have a problem with the education, but that reliance on the system for the food kind of bugs me a little bit," admits one participant. Perhaps by stressing that information is the primary handout in this thrust of the program, the public might interpret this kind of help differently.

During the discussions, parental-leave policies are often mentioned unprompted. Although this element of the program ranks at the bottom of their list of priorities, Californians undoubtedly see value in these policies, as they instinctively believe that having these policies will promote better-quality parenting. "Make sure there are appropriate parental-leave policies because you can't teach a parent how to be a parent if they don't have time to be a parent," insists one woman from Pasadena.

Funding for a school readiness program raises serious questions among California residents. Among the two alternative sources of funding tested in the groups, neither garners much support among participants. Very few participants are willing to pay higher taxes to fund the school readiness program, despite the fact that most believe the program would be an important undertaking. They

"Maybe the programs exist, but the information is not out there. I don't know about many programs that are very successful because you never see it. They're never identified in our communities. And, actually, without that, I just really don't know what they're doing with all the money. With all the lottery money and all the tax money."

–Hispanic opinion leader
Los Angeles

"No, they shouldn't use the K-to-12 money! They already have a certain amount, and the schools are already suffering."

–Hispanic opinion leader
Los Angeles

believe that their taxes are already too high, and there are no assurances that the additional funds would be used to pay for the program. Participants cite the state lottery system—the proceeds from which are supposed to be dedicated to supplement funding for the public school system—as an example of the state's misdeeds with earmarked funds. One Hispanic community leader in Los Angeles does not want to have her taxes raised "because they're going to do the same thing. They raise taxes, then we get nothing back."

Participants are also opposed to using funds allocated for K-to-12 education. A system they view as currently failing their children cannot withstand a budget cut (which is the way they perceive the reallocation of K-to-12 funds).

Although these perceptions could be a major obstacle to winning public support for school readiness, we believe that they could in fact give a school readiness campaign a foothold. If the program is positioned as an update of the old public school model that not only prepares young children to excel once they reach kindergarten, but also will result in students achieving at higher levels in the latter grades, the public could be persuaded to support the campaign as the best, last hope for K-to-12. Most participants agree that the current K-to-12 model of public education is outdated and relies on ideas at least 100 years old, so they are open to the argument that learning begins well before the age of five. Incorporating this reasoning and linking the program to the future transformation of K-to-12 would likely improve the odds that the public would get behind this effort. **We believe that this area could be an important topic for more in-depth qualitative research aimed at identifying the key themes and language the Commission could use to communicate the benefits of a public school system with 21st-century sensibilities.**

OTHER HURDLES

Beyond getting the public to focus on the state's youngest children, and overcoming doubts about California's ability to implement an effective school readiness program without busting the budget, the Commission would face a couple of other minor hurdles. Once participants acknowledge the importance of a program aimed at allowing every child to reach his or her full potential in school, competing visions of scope and apprehension of access and qualifications come into play.

Some envision nursery, pre-school, and pre-kindergarten programs that essentially ameliorate the need for all-day child-care programs, whereas others anticipate programs on a much smaller scale. Minority panelists are concerned about having access to information about such a program; they worry that their communities will continue to be overlooked and uninformed, which would prevent them from taking advantage of the program. Working-class participants

> **"I just have a problem with so much involvement in the bringing up, or teaching, or giving values to my child. It starts at home."**
>
> *–African-American woman*
> *Berkeley*

are afraid that they will be judged too affluent to qualify their children for a school readiness program. "I found out they have a program, but it's only for low-level incomes. I think the part that's being penalized are the middle-class people that have high ends . . . the low-incomes get it all. They have WIC programs, they have food stamps, they have buses available for them. I can't enjoy none of those things," says a Pasadena woman in the 25- to 40-year-old group.

Regardless of their vision, distrust, or expectation of exclusion, the public has no appetite for state-sponsored programs that undermine the responsibilities of parents. They want school readiness to be a pro-parent program that enables and empowers parents to give their children the best possible start in life. They do not want a program that coddles parents and exonerates them from being responsible for their children's welfare. "I see it as the government saying we're going to take over the responsibility that should be rightly yours. And we're gonna pretend that it's best for the children," remarks a male community leader from Sacramento. A school readiness program cannot be perceived as a 21st-century welfare program that gives the state the lion's share of responsibility for raising California's children.

Just as important, the various facets of any readiness program cannot be compulsory. Parents must be given the latitude to remain the final arbiters for decisions about their children's welfare and upbringing. "I think that there should be places available for help. It should never be something that a parent is demanded that they do," says a non-college educated Fresno woman in the age 40 to 65 group. Similar to the way many participants see the state as undermining parents' rights to discipline their children, they fear that the state will use a school readiness program as an excuse to undermine a parent's right to decide whether a program like this is best for their particular child.

There are other important permutations to consider—whether a universal pre-school system should be free to all (like the K-to-12 system) or based on ability to pay (like California's higher education system), and how closely integrated a universal pre-school system might be with the traditional K-to-12 system.

Panelists sometimes assume that a universal pre-school system would be part of the current elementary and secondary education system, and administered by the same people. Frequently, this assumption creates negative feelings about moving toward universal pre-school. The problems the public sees within the current school system serves to erode taxpayer confidence in the state's abilities to successfully manage an additional education program for the state's children.

INFLUENTIAL SPOKESPEOPLE

As previously discussed, most Californians are inclined to support the goals of a public school readiness program on the merits that it would better serve the interests of young children, parents, the K-to-12 public system, and society in general. For those who need to be persuaded further, hearing from those most intimately involved in the lives of young children would be the most effective means of confirming that a new school readiness program is a good idea.

> **"I think that the most important would be the parents of any age, because they're the ones who this program would be for, for their children. . . . How important it'd be to them, or not be important to them, whether or not they'd even buy into it."**
>
> *–Non-college male*
> *Age 25 to 40*
> *South San Francisco*

> **"I think it should be someone specific like teachers because they know what is going on with the children and parents."**
>
> *–Hispanic male*
> *Age 40 to 65*
> *San Diego*

Specifically, focus group participants say that teachers in the early grades and parents of young children are the most credible, top-tier sources of information about whether an undertaking like this is worthwhile. Second to them, in terms of their influence over the deliberations of the public on this matter, are pediatricians, parents of older children, and single parents. Potential spokespeople with the least amount of influence on issues related to school readiness are business leaders, law enforcement officials, and school nurses.

> **"The teachers are there every day, I mean, they can see a difference."**
>
> *–Hispanic male*
> *Age 25-40*
> *San Diego*

Participants were given a list of potential spokespeople and asked to identify the three most important and influential messengers as well as the three least important and influential messengers. Among approximately 200 people, 120 say that teachers who teach kindergarten and the early grades would be the best messengers. Almost 100 select parents of young children, and 83 choose doctors who are experienced in caring for children.

RATING OF SPOKESPEOPLE FOR A SCHOOL READINESS PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT[2]

	Most important or influential	Least important or influential
	#	#
Teachers who teach kindergarten and the early stages	120	11
Parents of young children	98	26
Pediatricians and doctors who are experienced in caring for children	83	22
Parents of older children	79	31

[2] Hispanic groups tested potential spokespeople in Spanish.

RATING OF SPOKESPEOPLE FOR A SCHOOL READINESS PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT[2]		
	Most important or influential	**Least important or influential**
	#	**#**
Single parents	69	36
Leaders of your local community	59	59
Middle school and high school teachers	57	42
Scientists who specialize in brain development	51	60
School nurses	36	63
Police chiefs and law enforcement officials	31	75
Business leaders	24	91